

This is a repository copy of *Isolation and characterisation of metaldehyde-degrading bacteria from domestic soils*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/114177/>

Version: Published Version

---

**Article:**

Moir, James orcid.org/0000-0003-2972-5235, Thomas, John Christopher, Sinclair, Christopher John et al. (1 more author) (2017) Isolation and characterisation of metaldehyde-degrading bacteria from domestic soils. *Microbial Biotechnology*. ISSN 1751-7915

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1751-7915.12719>

---

**Reuse**

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence. This licence allows you to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon the work, even commercially, as long as you credit the authors for the original work. More information and the full terms of the licence here:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

**Takedown**

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing [eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk) including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

## Brief report

## Isolation and characterization of metaldehyde-degrading bacteria from domestic soils

John C. Thomas,<sup>1,2</sup> Thorunn Helgason,<sup>1</sup>  
Chris J. Sinclair<sup>2</sup> and James W. B. Moir<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Biology, University of York, Heslington, York, YO10 5DD, UK.

<sup>2</sup>FERA Science Ltd (Fera), National Agri-Food Innovation Campus, Sand Hutton, York, UK.

## Summary

Metaldehyde is a common molluscicide, used to control slugs in agriculture and horticulture. It is resistant to breakdown by current water treatment processes, and its accumulation in drinking water sources leads to regular regulatory failures in drinking water quality. To address this problem, we isolated metaldehyde-degrading microbes from domestic soils. Two distinct bacterial isolates were cultured, that were able to grow prototrophically using metaldehyde as sole carbon and energy source. One isolate belonged to the genus *Acinetobacter* (strain designation E1) and the other isolate belonged to the genus *Variovorax* (strain designation E3). *Acinetobacter* E1 was able to degrade metaldehyde to a residual concentration < 1 nM, whereas closely related *Acinetobacter* strains were completely unable to degrade metaldehyde. *Variovorax* E3 grew and degraded metaldehyde more slowly than *Acinetobacter* E1, and residual metaldehyde remained at the end of growth of the *Variovorax* E3 strain. Biological degradation of metaldehyde using these bacterial strains or approaches that allow *in situ* amplification of metaldehyde-degrading bacteria may represent a way forward for dealing with metaldehyde contamination in soils and water.

## Introduction

Metaldehyde (CH<sub>3</sub>CHO)<sub>4</sub> is an ether, formed from a cyclic tetramerization of acetaldehyde (Fig. 1A) (Kekulé and

Zincke, 1872). Metaldehyde was initially used as a solid fuel firelighter 'Meta-fuel' (Miller, 1928), but its major contemporary use is as a molluscicide in agriculture and horticulture. Its application in controlling slugs was known as early as 1934 (Gimingham, 1940), and it is now widely used in both agricultural fields and domestic gardens. It is applied as a pelleted bran bait that inhibits slug feeding after exposure (Wedgwood and Bailey, 1988), causing effects such as the distention and disintegration of the Golgi apparatus and endoplasmic reticulum in the mucus cells of slugs (Triebkorn *et al.*, 1998).

In 2014, Metaldehyde accounted for 87% of all recorded molluscicide applications on agricultural fields in the UK (Garthwaite *et al.*, 2015). 112 tonnes were applied over 920 thousand hectares (21% of surveyed arable land used to grow crops) in Britain in 2014; primarily on wheat, oilseed rape and potato crops (Garthwaite *et al.*, 2015). The vast majority of failures in drinking water quality in the UK, due to pesticide contamination, are caused by metaldehyde exceeding the regulatory limit of 0.1 µg l<sup>-1</sup> (≡ 0.6 nM) (European Union Council Directive 98/83/EC) (Fig. 1B).

The recalcitrance of metaldehyde to degradation at ambient temperature (Fleischmann *et al.*, 2000) is problematic for water treatment, as metaldehyde is not removed by conventional water treatment processes (Kay and Grayson, 2014). Researchers are pursuing a variety of chemical and physical approaches to deal with the problem of metaldehyde contamination (Autin *et al.*, 2013; Doria *et al.*, 2013; Tao and Fletcher, 2013, 2014). But currently, no economical method exists to degrade or remove metaldehyde from water.

It has been shown that the xenobiotic metaldehyde can be quickly degraded in soils (Zhang *et al.*, 2011) and is oxidized to carbon dioxide under aerobic conditions in unsterilized soils (EFSA, 2010). This strongly suggests the involvement of microbes in its degradation, although no microorganisms have been isolated to date that degrade metaldehyde. The degradation of metaldehyde to CO<sub>2</sub> is strongly exothermic [heat of combustion 3370 kJ mol<sup>-1</sup> (Fleischmann *et al.*, 2000)], suggesting that it has the potential to be a carbon and energy source to support microbial growth. Soils are home to a vast array of microbes and represent a source of metabolic activities

Received 16 November, 2016; revised 21 March, 2017; accepted 23 March, 2017.

\*For correspondence. E-mail james.moir@york.ac.uk; Tel. +44-1904-328677.

*Microbial Biotechnology* (2017) 00(00), 000–000  
doi:10.1111/1751-7915.12719

© 2017 The Authors. *Microbial Biotechnology* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd and Society for Applied Microbiology.

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

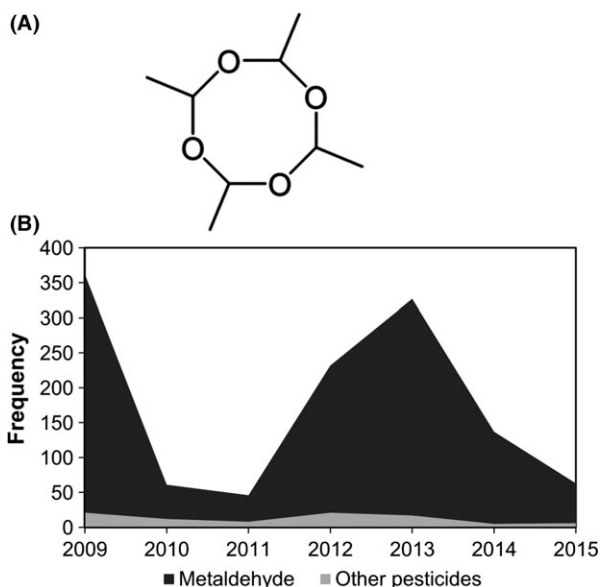


Fig. 1. A. Skeletal structure of metaldehyde.

B. Frequency of water quality failures per year in the UK due to metaldehyde or all other pesticides. Compiled from the Drinking Water Inspectorate annual regional reports, available from <http://www.dwi.gov.uk/about/annual-report>.

that may be of use in industrial and medicinal applications (Delmont *et al.*, 2011). Here, we enriched microbes from soils and report the first isolation and identification of microbial isolates capable of using metaldehyde as a sole source of energy and carbon for growth.

## Results and Discussion

### *Two distinct metaldehyde-degrading strains were isolated from domestic soils*

Metaldehyde-degrading bacteria were selected in a mineral medium consisting of salts  $\text{Na}_2\text{HPO}_4$  (55 mM),  $\text{KH}_2\text{PO}_4$  (11 mM),  $\text{NH}_4\text{Cl}$  (6 mM) and  $\text{MgSO}_4$  (0.4 mM) (pH 7). This was supplemented with  $2 \text{ ml l}^{-1}$  of a trace elements solution (Vishniac and Santer, 1957). Metaldehyde was provided as sole carbon source and control cultures lacked metaldehyde. Ability to grow using metaldehyde was tested in both liquid enrichment cultures and on solid media, containing 1.5% agarose. 100 ml liquid cultures were inoculated with 1 g of soil obtained from domestic gardens in York, UK. Cultures were incubated at  $30^\circ\text{C}$  for 3 days, 1 ml of enrichment media was subcultured into fresh media and incubated for a further 3 days and subsequently samples were spread onto agarose plates containing  $2800 \mu\text{M}$  ( $500 \text{ mg l}^{-1}$ ) metaldehyde. Fifty to 200 colonies were obtained on plates when the enrichments were carried out in liquid culture in the presence of  $570 \mu\text{M}$  ( $100 \text{ mg l}^{-1}$ ) metaldehyde, but not following control enrichments in the absence of

metaldehyde. 1 g samples of the same domestic soils were re-suspended in 10 ml of sterile water and  $100 \mu\text{l}$  aliquots spread directly onto agarose plates containing metaldehyde. Two to five colonies grew on these plates. The morphology of all the colonies was white, round and glossy. Ten isolates were picked for further analysis and named E1-E6 and M1-M4, to designate the source soils used. Soil E had a recent history of metaldehyde utilization, whereas soil M had not been treated with metaldehyde for at least 5 years. In each case, the isolated strains grew on agarose plates supplemented with metaldehyde, but not in its absence, suggesting they were utilizing metaldehyde as a carbon and energy source.

On subculturing the metaldehyde-degrading strains, each strain appeared to be a pure culture, except strain E4 which yielded two distinct colony morphologies, and was subsequently subdivided into E4a and E4b. Colonies from strains E1, E3, E4a, E4b, E5, M1 and M4 were used for amplification of 16S rDNA as described previously with primers U8F and U1492R (Eden *et al.*, 1991). Amplification was achieved using GoTaq polymerase (Promega) with a standard programme of:  $98^\circ\text{C}$  for 30 s; 35 cycles of  $98^\circ\text{C}$  for 10 s,  $50^\circ\text{C}$  for 30 s,  $72^\circ\text{C}$  for 60 s;  $72^\circ\text{C}$  for 10 min. PCR products were purified using QIAquick PCR purification kit (Qiagen, Manchester, UK) following the manufacturer's instructions. For restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP) analysis,  $1 \mu\text{g}$  of purified DNA was digested for 1 or 3 h at  $37^\circ\text{C}$  using restriction enzyme HhaI. RFLP revealed two distinctly different ribotypes (see Supporting Information). Two examples of each ribotype were sequenced. Sanger sequencing was used to obtain the nucleotide sequences of the U8F-U1492R amplicons of E1, M1, E3 and E4a using U8F as sequencing primer. Sequences from E1 and M1 were aligned using ClustalX V2.1 and found to be identical across the  $> 900$  base region where the base sequence could be confidently assigned. Similarly, the sequences from E3 and E4a were found to be identical across a  $> 900$  base region.

Subsequent investigation focused on the strains E1 and E3. The sequences of E1 and E3 (see Supporting Information) type strains of *A. pittii*, *A. oleivorans* and *A. seiferthii* also had 99% identity to E1. The E3 sequence has 99% identity to type strains of *Variovorax boronicumulans*, *V. paradoxus*, *V. guangxiensis*, *V. ginsengisoli*. Based on these analyses, the isolates have been assigned genera and designated *Acinetobacter* E1 and *Variovorax* E3.

### *The disappearance of metaldehyde from minimal media is proportional to the growth of Acinetobacter E1 and Variovorax E3 in pure cultures*

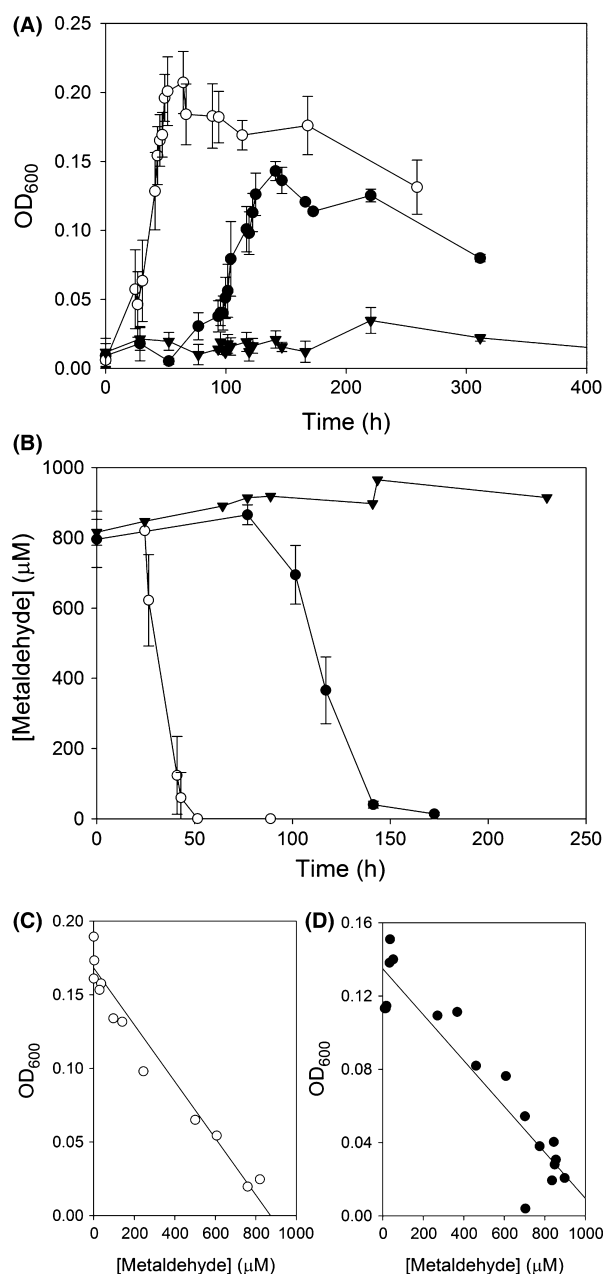
Triplicate cultures of *Acinetobacter* E1 and *Variovorax* E3 were grown in minimal media with  $850 \mu\text{M}$

(150 mg l<sup>-1</sup>) metaldehyde, incubated at 30°C with shaking at 200 rpm. An additional three flasks of media were not inoculated. Periodic samples were taken from each culture, and an uninoculated media flask and OD<sub>600</sub> measurements were made. Contemporaneously, cellular material was removed from samples by centrifugation at 5000 × *g*, the supernatant aspirated and stored at -20°C for later analysis of metaldehyde content. Growth curves are shown in Fig. 2A. During the exponential growth phase, *Acinetobacter* E1 had a doubling time of 8.5 h, and *Variovorax* E3 had a doubling time of c. 22 h. There was no increase in optical density in the uninoculated control culture. Metaldehyde concentration of culture media samples was quantified by liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry (for method, see Supporting Information). Metaldehyde disappeared over a similar timescale to the growth of the E1 and E3 isolates (Fig. 2B). The disappearance of metaldehyde from the cultures was correlated with the growth of the isolates (Fig. 2C and D). As the sole carbon and energy source present in the culture medium, it can be concluded that the strains were catabolizing metaldehyde for growth. *Variovorax* E3 catabolizes metaldehyde more slowly and has a longer lag time, lower maximum optical density, longer doubling time and higher final concentration of residual metaldehyde compared to *Acinetobacter* E1.

*Utilization of metaldehyde by Acinetobacter E1 is a property not shared by other Acinetobacter*

The remainder of the work focused on *Acinetobacter* E1 which has faster growth kinetics, and a more rapid and complete utilization of metaldehyde, compared to *Variovorax* E3. *Acinetobacter* E1 was unable to grow using glucose, fructose, arabinose or glycerol as alternative carbon substrates.

It was desirable to identify other strains related to *Acinetobacter* E1 for comparative purposes. *A. calcoaceticus* RUH 2202 (Nemec *et al.*, 2011) was purchased from the Belgian Coordinated Collection of Microorganisms, *A. calcoaceticus* ANC3678 (Nemec *et al.*, 2011), *A. calcoaceticus* NIPH1 (Nemec *et al.*, 1999), *A. pittii* ANC3678 (Nemec *et al.*, 2011) *A. pittii* 70.29 (Seifert *et al.*, 1994) and *A. baylyi* DSM14961 (Carr *et al.*, 2003) from the CIP culture collection (Pasteur Institute, Paris). The ability of these *Acinetobacter* to use metaldehyde was assessed by streaking colonies from an LB plate onto a MSM + metaldehyde plate and inoculating into liquid media containing 850 µM metaldehyde. There were no signs of growth in either media after 4 days' incubation at 30°C. *Acinetobacter* E1, unlike strain RUH 2202, was able to grow on phenol, whereas *A. calcoaceticus* RUH 2202 grew on 1%



**Fig. 2.** Growth and metaldehyde utilization by *Acinetobacter* E1 and *Variovorax* E3.

A. Mean OD<sub>600</sub> (measured using a Jenway 6300 spectrophotometer) in liquid culture with 850 µM metaldehyde as sole carbon and energy source, inoculated with single colonies of *Acinetobacter* E1 (open circles) and *Variovorax* E3 (filled circles), or not inoculated (filled triangles). Error bars give SD of triplicate independent cultures.

B. Mean [metaldehyde] in culture media during growth of *Acinetobacter* E1 (open circles) and *Variovorax* E3 (filled circles), or not inoculated (filled triangles). Error bars give SD of triplicate independent cultures. Correlation between culture optical density and residual metaldehyde concentration during growth of (C) *Acinetobacter* E1 ( $R^2 = 0.94$ ) and (D) *Variovorax* E3 ( $R^2 = 0.88$ ) in media containing metaldehyde as the sole energy and carbon source.

ethanol as a carbon source, but strain E1 could not grow with ethanol. Both *Acinetobacter* strains E1 and RUH 2202 grew on acetate as a carbon source, which allowed for comparative analysis of metaldehyde utilization under the same growth conditions. Following growth on acetate as sole carbon source, *Acinetobacter* E1 utilized 40  $\mu\text{M}$  metaldehyde over a 30 min period, whereas there was no loss of metaldehyde in cultures of *A. calcoaceticus* RUH 2202 (Fig. 3A).

*Acinetobacter* E1 degrades metaldehyde to completion, and this degradation is followed by oxygen consumption

Following growth on metaldehyde, *Acinetobacter* E1 utilized 40  $\mu\text{M}$  metaldehyde over a 12 min period (Fig. 3A). This suggests a *c.* twofold increase in activity of the metaldehyde-degrading enzyme following culturing with metaldehyde. Furthermore, suspensions of *Acinetobacter* E1 utilize oxygen in a metaldehyde-dependent manner after growth on metaldehyde, but not after growth on acetate (Fig. 3B). This oxygen consumption is delayed compared to metaldehyde disappearance, indicating that the metaldehyde catabolism involves metaldehyde degradation, followed by an oxygen-dependent metabolic step. The apparent  $K_M$  of cell suspensions of *Acinetobacter* E1 for metaldehyde was *c.* 50  $\mu\text{M}$ , and it is noted that metaldehyde was degraded to below the limit of detection in these experiments ( $< 1$  nM metaldehyde) in 30 min (Fig. 3C), which suggests that this or similar strains may have value in future bioremediation strategies.

Metaldehyde is a xenobiotic (i.e. only in existence due to human activity via chemical synthesis) that has been in widespread use for about 100 years. The

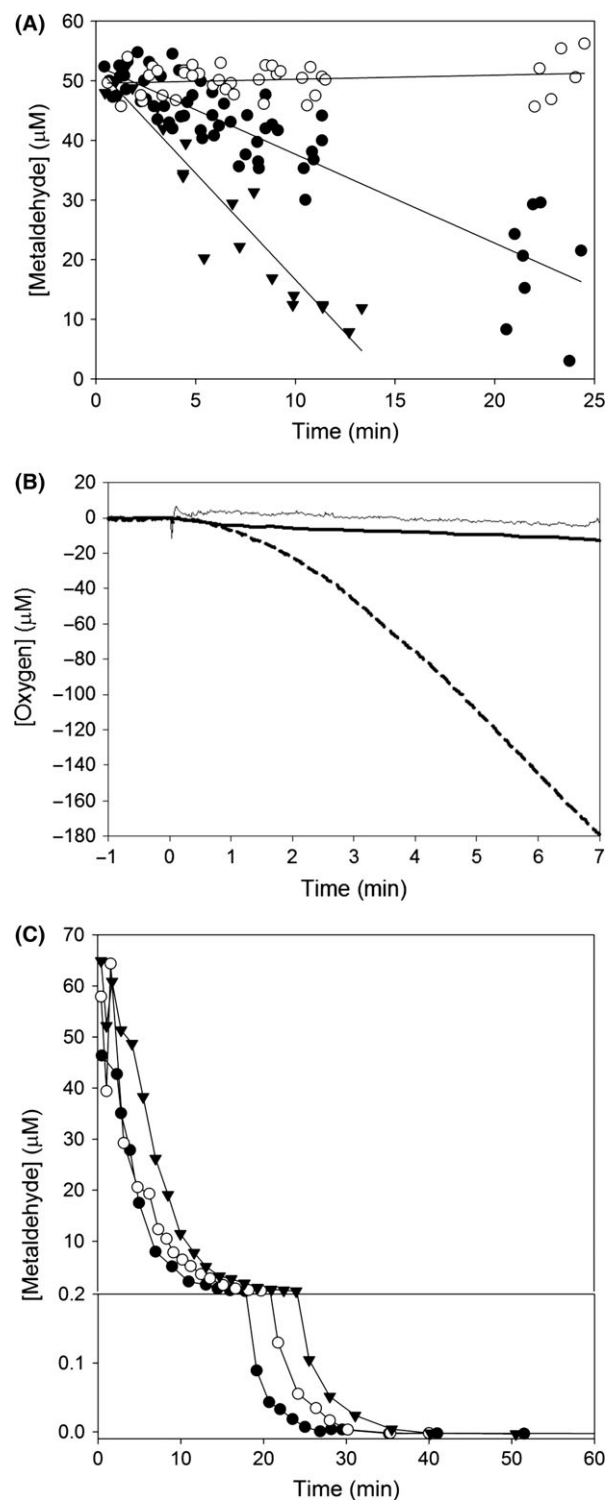
metaldehyde-degrading strains *Acinetobacter* E1 and *Variovorax* E3 share evolutionary heritage with other bacteria with versatile metabolism (Fewson, 1967; Williams *et al.*, 1991) and a demonstrated ability to degrade xenobiotics (Mirgain *et al.*, 1993; Greene *et al.*, 2000;

**Fig. 3.** Metaldehyde utilization and metaldehyde-dependent oxygen utilization.

A. Metaldehyde utilization in samples of washed *Acinetobacter* cells resuspended to an  $\text{OD}_{600} = 1.0$  treated with 53  $\mu\text{M}$  metaldehyde following culture of *Acinetobacter* E1 in acetate (filled circles; rate of metaldehyde utilization =  $1.5 \pm 0.1 \mu\text{M min}^{-1}$ ) or in metaldehyde (filled triangles; rate of metaldehyde utilization =  $3.8 \pm 0.3 \mu\text{M min}^{-1}$ ), or strain RUH 2202 grown with acetate (open circles; rate of metaldehyde utilization =  $-0.1 \pm 0.1 \mu\text{M min}^{-1}$ ) as sole carbon source.

B. Metaldehyde-dependent oxygen utilization in samples of washed *Acinetobacter* cells resuspended to an  $\text{OD}_{600} = 1.0$  treated with 53  $\mu\text{M}$  metaldehyde added at time zero. *A. calcoaceticus* RUH2202 (cultured in acetate) (solid thin line; rate of  $\text{O}_2$  utilization =  $1.6 \pm 0.4 \mu\text{M min}^{-1}$ ), *Acinetobacter* E1 cultured in acetate (solid thick line; rate of  $\text{O}_2$  utilization =  $2.7 \pm 1.1 \mu\text{M min}^{-1}$ ) or in metaldehyde (dashed line; rate of  $\text{O}_2$  utilization =  $24.5 \pm 3.8 \mu\text{M min}^{-1}$ ). Data are representative of at least three replicates.

C. Three time-courses of metaldehyde degradation following culture of *Acinetobacter* E1 with metaldehyde as sole carbon source. Metaldehyde axis is split to show rate of disappearance between 0–0.2  $\mu\text{M}$ , and 0.2–50  $\mu\text{M}$  metaldehyde.





Sorensen *et al.*, 2005; Wang and Gu, 2006; Bruland *et al.*, 2009; Carbajal-Rodriguez *et al.*, 2011; Zhang *et al.*, 2012; Rajoo *et al.*, 2013; Murdoch and Hay, 2015) and other potentially recalcitrant chemicals (Reisfeld *et al.*, 1972; Abbott *et al.*, 1973; Koh *et al.*, 1985; Hwang and Draughon, 1994; Singh and Lin, 2008; Zhao *et al.*, 2009). The metabolic versatility of *Acinetobacter* and *Variovorax* isolates varies between isolates, presumably due to horizontal acquisition of genetic traits, selected in particular environments. Future work will focus on identifying the mechanistic basis for metaldehyde degradation.

To conclude, here we have demonstrated the first isolation of bacteria capable of degrading the commonly used molluscicide metaldehyde. Metaldehyde is a stable polymer of acetaldehyde which consists of a ring structure in which the bonds are aliphatic C-C single bonds and C-O ethers. Biological degradation of metaldehyde via the metabolic processes in bacteria such as *Acinetobacter* E1 and *Variovorax* E3 may prove valuable in dealing with metaldehyde contamination in natural environments and drinking water sources.

## Acknowledgements

JCT was supported by a Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) studentship.

## Conflict of interest

None declared.

## References

- Abbott, B.J., Laskin, A.I., and McCoy, C.J. (1973) Growth of *Acinetobacter calcoaceticus* on ethanol. *Appl Microbiol* **25**: 787–792.
- Autin, O., Hart, J., Jarvis, P., MacAdam, J., Parsons, S.A., and Jefferson, B. (2013) The impact of background organic matter and alkalinity on the degradation of the pesticide metaldehyde by two advanced oxidation processes: UV/H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> and UV/TiO<sub>2</sub>. *Water Res* **47**: 2041–2049.
- Bruland, N., Wubbeler, J.H., and Steinbuchel, A. (2009) 3-mercaptopropionate dioxygenase, a cysteine dioxygenase homologue, catalyzes the initial step of 3-mercaptopropionate catabolism in the 3,3-thiodipropionic acid-degrading bacterium *Variovorax paradoxus*. *J Biol Chem* **284**: 660–672.
- Carbajal-Rodriguez, I., Stoveken, N., Satola, B., Wubbeler, J.H., and Steinbuchel, A. (2011) Aerobic degradation of mercaptosuccinate by the Gram negative bacterium *Variovorax paradoxus* Strain B4. *J Bacteriol* **193**: 527–539.
- Carr, E.L., Kampfer, P., Patel, B.K., Gurtler, V., and Seviour, R.J. (2003) Seven novel species of *Acinetobacter* isolated from activated sludge. *Int J Syst Evol Microbiol* **53**: 953–963.
- Delmont, T.O., Malandain, C., Prestat, E., Larose, C., Monier, J.M., Simonet, P., and Vogel, T.M. (2011) Metagenomic mining for microbiologists. *ISME J* **5**: 1837–1843.
- Doria, F.C., Borges, A., Kim, J., Nathan, A., Joo, J., and Campos, L. (2013) Removal of metaldehyde through photocatalytic reactions using nano-sized zinc oxide composites. *Water Air Soil Pollut* **224**: 1–9.
- Eden, P.A., Schmidt, T.M., Blakemore, R.P., and Pace, N.R. (1991) Phylogenetic analysis of *Aquaspirillum magnetotacticum* using polymerase chain reaction-amplified 16S rRNA-specific DNA. *Int J Syst Bacteriol* **41**: 324–325.
- EFSA (2010) Conclusion on the peer review of the pesticide risk assessment of the active substance metaldehyde. *EFSA Journal*. DOI: 10.2903/j.efsa.2010.1856.
- Fewson, C.A. (1967) The identity of Gram negative bacterium NCIB 8250 (*Vibrio* 01). *J Gen Microbiol* **48**: 107–110.
- Fleischmann, G., Jira, R., Bolt, H.M. and Golka, K. (2000) Acetaldehyde. In *Ullmann's Encyclopedia of Industrial Chemistry*. Hoboken, New Jersey, USA: Wiley-VCH Verlag GmbH & Co. KGaA.
- Garthwaite, D., Barker, I., Laybourn, R., Huntly, A., Parrish, G.P., Hudson, S. and Thygesen, H. (2015). In *Pesticide Usage Survey Report 263 -Arable crops in the UK*. Department for Environment. London: Defra.
- Gimingham, C. (1940) Some recent contributions by English workers to the development of methods of insect control. *Ann Appl Biol* **27**: 161–175.
- Greene, E.A., Beatty, P.H., and Fedorak, P.M. (2000) Sulfolane degradation by mixed cultures and a bacterial isolate identified as a *Variovorax* sp. *Arch Microbiol* **174**: 111–119.
- Hwang, C.A., and Draughon, F.A. (1994) Degradation of Ochratoxin A by *Acinetobacter calcoaceticus*. *J Food Protect* **57**: 410–414.
- Kay, P., and Grayson, R. (2014) Using water industry data to assess the metaldehyde pollution problem. *Water Environ J* **28**: 410–417.
- Kekulé, A., and Zincke, T. (1872) Ueber das sogenannte chloraceten und die polymeren modificationen des aldehyds. *Justus Liebigs Annalen der Chemie* **162**: 125–150.
- Koh, J.S., Yamakawa, T., Kodama, T., and Minoda, Y. (1985) Rapid and dense culture of *Acinetobacter calcoaceticus* on palm oil. *Agr Biol Chem Tokyo* **49**: 1411–1416.
- Miller, R. (1928) Poisoning by “Meta Fuel” tablets (metacetaldehyde). *Arch Dis Child* **3**: 292–295.
- Mirgain, I., Green, G.A., and Monteil, H. (1993) Degradation of atrazine in laboratory microcosms: isolation and identification of the biodegrading bacteria. *Environ Toxicol Chem* **12**: 1627–1634.
- Murdoch, R.W., and Hay, A.G. (2015) The biotransformation of ibuprofen to trihydroxyibuprofen in activated sludge and by *Variovorax* Ibu-1. *Biodegradation* **26**: 105–113.
- Nemec, A., Janda, L., Melter, O., and Dijkshoorn, L. (1999) Genotypic and phenotypic similarity of multiresistant *Acinetobacter baumannii* isolates in the Czech Republic. *J Med Microbiol* **48**: 287–296.
- Nemec, A., Krizova, L., Maixnerova, M., van der Reijden, T.J., Deschaght, P., Passet, V., *et al.* (2011) Genotypic and phenotypic characterization of the *Acinetobacter*

- calcoaceticus*-*Acinetobacter baumannii* complex with the proposal of *Acinetobacter pittii* sp. nov. (formerly *Acinetobacter* genomic species 3) and *Acinetobacter nosocomialis* sp. nov. (formerly *Acinetobacter* genomic species 13TU). *Res Microbiol* **162**: 393–404.
- Rajoo, S., Ahn, J.O., Lee, H.W., and Jung, J.K. (2013) Isolation and characterization of a novel epsilon-caprolactam-degrading microbe. *Acinetobacter calcoaceticus*, from industrial wastewater by chemostat enrichment. *Biotechnol Lett* **35**: 2069–2072.
- Reisfeld, A., Rosenber, E. and Gutnick, D. (1972) Microbial degradation of crude oil: factors affecting dispersion in sea water by mixed and pure cultures. *Appl Microbiol* **24**, 363–368.
- Seifert, H., Schulze, A., Baginski, R., and Pulverer, G. (1994) Comparison of four different methods for epidemiologic typing of *Acinetobacter baumannii*. *J Clin Microbiol* **32**: 1816–1819.
- Singh, C., and Lin, J. (2008) Isolation and characterization of diesel oil degrading indigenous microorganisms in Kwa-zulu-Natal, South Africa. *Afr J Biotechnol* **7**: 1927–1932.
- Sorensen, S.R., Rasmussen, J., Jacobsen, C.S., Jacobsen, O.S., Juhler, R.K., and Aamand, J. (2005) Elucidating the key member of a linuron-mineralizing bacterial community by PCR and reverse transcription-PCR denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis 16S rRNA gene fingerprinting and cultivation. *Appl Environ Microb* **71**: 4144–4148.
- Tao, B., and Fletcher, A.J. (2013) Metaldehyde removal from aqueous solution by adsorption and ion exchange mechanisms onto activated carbon and polymeric sorbents. *J Hazard Mater* **244–245**: 240–250.
- Tao, B., and Fletcher, A.J. (2014) Catalytic degradation and adsorption of metaldehyde from drinking water by functionalized mesoporous silicas and ion-exchange resin. *Sep Purif Technol* **124**: 195–200.
- Triebkorn, R., Christensen, K., and Heim, G. (1998) Effects of orally and dermally applied metaldehyde on mucus cells of slugs (*Deroceras reticulatum*) depending on temperature and duration of exposure. *J Mollus Stud* **64**: 467–487.
- Vishniac, W., and Santer, M. (1957) The thiobacilli. *Bacteriol Rev* **21**: 195–213.
- Wang, Y.P., and Gu, J.D. (2006) Degradability of dimethyl terephthalate by *Variovorax paradoxus* T4 and *Sphingomonas yanoikuyae* DOS01 isolated from deep-ocean sediments. *Ecotoxicol* **15**: 549–557.
- Wedgwood, M.A., and Bailey, S.E. (1988) The inhibitory effects of the molluscicide metaldehyde on feeding, locomotion and faecal elimination of three pest species of terrestrial slug. *Ann Appl Biol* **112**: 439–457.
- Willems, A., De Ley, J., Gillis, M., and Kersters, K. (1991) Comamonadaceae, a New Family Encompassing the *Acidovorans* ribosomal RNA complex, including *Variovorax paradoxus* gen. nov., comb. nov., for *Alcaligenes paradoxus* (Davis 1969). *Int J Syst Bacteriol* **41**: 445–450.
- Zhang, H.-Y., Wang, C., Lu, H.-Z., Guan, W.-B., and Ma, Y.-Q. (2011) Residues and dissipation dynamics of molluscicide metaldehyde in cabbage and soil. *Ecotox Environ Safe* **74**: 1653–1658.
- Zhang, H.J., Zhou, Q.W., Zhou, G.C., Cao, Y.M., Dai, Y.J., Ji, W.W., et al. (2012) Biotransformation of the neonicotinoid insecticide Thiacloprid by the bacterium *Variovorax boronicumulans* Strain J1 and mediation of the major metabolic pathway by nitrile hydratase. *J Agr Food Chem* **60**: 153–159.
- Zhao, X.H., He, X., Wang, J.N., Song, Y.M., Geng, G.X., and Wang, J.H. (2009) Biodegradation of Swainsonine by *Acinetobacter calcoaceticus* strain YLZZ-1 and its isolation and identification. *Biodegradation* **20**: 331–338.

## Supporting information

Additional Supporting Information may be found online in the supporting information tab for this article:

**Fig. S1.** RFLP analysis of metaldehyde-degrading bacterial isolates.